

How  
THE MEDIA  
CAN PROMOTE



# EDUCATION

Girls'

Project Design No. 8

## THE MEDIA AND GIRLS' EDUCATION: REPORTING ON A CRITICAL ISSUE

*Members of the media have the opportunity to take the lead in covering a story of increasing importance to their nation. Your readers or audience are the very decision-makers, community leaders, and parents who need to understand that the investment in girls' education is the most powerful investment for their future and their country's. You understand as well as anyone the importance of a literate population to the growth of your own readership or audience. As the communications revolution continues to inform men and women alike with reports about issues affecting their lives, it also spawns new readers who will associate your coverage of girls' education with the forward-looking forces for change in your region.*

### WHY IS GIRLS' EDUCATION AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT STORY?

The education of girls is a stimulus for societal change and human development. Studies consistently document that girls' education enhances the welfare of the population and increases the country's economic productivity. At the 1998 international conference, "Educating Girls: A Development Imperative," Lawrence Summers, the current Secretary of the U.S. Treasury and a former World Bank economist, asserted that investing in educating girls provides the highest returns, both economically and socially.

Despite the expansion of primary school enrollments in developing countries in recent years, the educational participation of girls trails that of boys. The basic right to education is not benefiting girls equally. Even if a country's laws and policies support girls' education, the understanding of its vital link to the future has yet to be fully understood by most people. This lack of understanding by the general public inhibits the effectiveness of laws and policies designed to reform the education system.

## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION TO SOCIETY?

- **Reducing Poverty** — Every additional year that a girl attends school beyond fourth grade results in an adult with higher wages and a smaller family. These effects multiply with each succeeding generation.
- **Improving Health** — Each additional year of schooling that a mother completed as a girl is associated with a 5 to 10 percent decline in infant mortality for her children. Educated women are more likely to prepare nutritious diets for their families than their undereducated sisters. They also seek early and more effective health care for their families.
- **Safeguarding Family Welfare** — Women are usually responsible for household nutrition, sanitation, food storage and preparation, medication, and other duties that determine the family's welfare. Studies find that educated women are far more likely than illiterate women to establish and maintain healthy familial environments.
- **Increasing Productivity** — The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) credits women with producing more than half of the world's food and, in rural areas, up to 80 percent of the food consumed in their homes. Surveys demonstrate that women with a primary education are more effective food producers than uneducated women. One study found that four years of primary school increased women's agricultural production by 7.4 percent.

There is no disputing the importance of the basic story: a country must have a well-trained and educated population to compete successfully in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Undereducated women represent a major bottleneck to the achievement of economic modernization, social equity, population stabilization, full democratic participation, and a higher quality of life for all. A focus on girls' education raises the quality of primary school education for all students. By documenting the gains of girls' education today, and calling attention to the barriers that still exist, the media will play a pivotal role in writing the history of national economic and social progress.

## FACTS ABOUT THE STATUS OF GIRLS' EDUCATION

- Of the 140 million children who do not reach primary school, 60 percent are girls.
- In the developing world, fewer than 10 percent of young women are attending school by the time they are 15 years old.
- Fifty percent of girls in sub-Saharan Africa are out of school, compared with 22 percent in the Middle East and North Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, and 7 percent in Europe and the Americas.
- The total number of girls out of school in sub-Saharan Africa is projected to double between 1990 and 2015, reaching 45 million.
- For every three girls born in South Asia or the Middle East, only one will complete primary school.

## HOW CAN THE MEDIA PROMOTE GIRLS' EDUCATION?

A wide variety of issues offer the media the opportunity to tell the story of girls' education. In addition to informing the public of the successes of the educational system, media can spur important educational reform in girls' enrollment in and completion of primary school as well as in the quality of the educational programs.

Media can:

- Run radio and television spots that heighten awareness of the needs for girls' education.
- Produce a weekly radio program that highlights what different schools and countries are doing to promote girls' education.

In Peru, radio listeners could tune in to a number of programs on girls' education aired from December 1998 - February 1999. One that lasted for three weeks in December was a weekday morning, hourly broadcast informing urban audiences of the philosophy and activities of a regional girls' education project. A Sunday morning broadcast in January devoted one hour to a discussion of the teachers and the curriculum in the region and promoted teacher awareness of cultural and gender bias in schools. During the month of February, rural communities heard messages about the importance of girls' education in five-minute morning segments broadcast daily in the local dialect.

- Produce a documentary about the factors that influence girls' education and identify how different groups (e.g., parents, business people, politicians, and religious leaders) can provide support.
- Write a series of editorials about girls' education (e.g., a commentary on the impact of an international conference on girls' education, a successful project in another country, or the national goals in girls' education for the next decade).
- Produce a television series or soap opera that focuses on girls' education in rural and urban areas. Each week, discuss different issues that girls face (e.g., extra work, harassment, discrimination, and lowered expectations).

Dorria Sharf El-din, deputy production sector director and news announcer for Egypt Television, stresses the importance of using drama in reaching girls and women in the home with a message about schooling. Television, radio, and short and long films can dramatize the problems, illustrate solutions, and give indirect advice and guidance to girls and women.

- Organize a workshop for journalists to inform them about the issues surrounding girls' education.

## HOW CAN THE MEDIA BREAK DOWN BARRIERS TO GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Very good stories can be found in the range of social, cultural, and economic barriers that discourage girls from starting school and staying enrolled. If allowed a little extra time to explore the girls' education angle, reporters' coverage can raise public awareness, influence debate, and engage decision-makers in the promotion of girls' education.

- **Access to schools**

**STORY TIP:** In support of a new law or policy affording greater access to schools for girls, a story could be prepared that emphasizes the direct contribution of girls' education to the economic prosperity of the family, the immediate community, and the future of the nation.

An understanding of the role that geographical distance plays in the under-enrollment of many girls led the Government of Egypt to build new schools close to communities, shortening the distance for the girls to travel.

- **The high cost of school for a poor family**

**STORY TIP:** A human interest story could focus on the struggle of a low-income family to meet payments for tuition, books, clothing, and transportation for their daughter, whose attendance at school deprives the household of help with domestic chores, including caring for younger children, carrying water, and gathering wood. Despite this loss, the family remains convinced of the value of educating the girl.

—The Malawi government offered a fee waiver for girls who continually advance through school.

—The Guatemala coffee growers association has worked with the government to provide scholarships and grants to girls since 1995 through local parents' associations.

—In Peru, school students receive free medical insurance.

- **Son preference**

**STORY TIP:** A feature article or radio program based on a survey to find out if the girls in families are undereducated because of cultural and economic reasons that favor their sons could enliven debate about the assumptions that undervalue daughters. For example, there may be differences found among urban and rural families that may be of particular interest to an audience.

"Education implies a better life, better health for a woman, and better guidance for her children. Spotlighting these facts could motivate the opening of more schools in needy areas and might encourage more fathers to send their children to school."

Sathya Saran, one of India's leading journalists

- **Safety/modesty**

**STORY TIP:** The distance one's daughter has to travel, her safety, and the school's sanitation are all key factors that concern parents when deciding whether a girl will attend and stay in school. Interviews with

families about their concerns for their daughters could best illustrate what these obstacles are, and may also identify some of the best solutions.

Community-based schools and programs have expanded access in many rural settings in Bangladesh, Colombia, and Mali, among other countries. By involving the whole community in developing, organizing, and managing the educational facilities, community schools gain local support, encourage innovative partnerships among private and public sectors, and provide girls' education at sustainable costs.

- **Gender-insensitive teachers and curricula**

**STORY TIP:** Interview education officials to highlight their efforts in making the classroom more girl-friendly. Often, teachers give girls less time and encouragement than boys; girls are relegated to the back of the classroom, are ignored or interrupted more frequently, and receive more negative reinforcement. Both male and female teachers need training to counteract these habits. Girls are assumed to be suitable primarily for home economics. Curricula need to be revised to eliminate gender bias. Firsthand reports from girls who have persisted in school despite barriers offer compelling human-interest stories.

The Malawi government has introduced a gender-sensitive curriculum for classes 1 through 8 for all schools and in all subjects.

- **Early marriage and childbearing**

**STORY TIP:** One television producer developed a good story in support of girls' education by contrasting the lives of two sisters, one who received a good education, the other who became pregnant and dropped out of school at an early age. The educated sister had a good job, was married, and had educated children. The other was poor, worked the best she could in the informal sector, and had more children than she could possibly educate.

"Re-enrollment" in school after pregnancy is one story that must be addressed to audiences at several levels. Changes in law, community policies, and family customs are all necessary to allow girls to resume their education after the birth of a child. Girls who have a child usually have to end their education, either by law or custom. Early marriage can end all possibility of a proper education.

"Too old for toys, too young for marriage and childbirth, the adolescent girl often falls between the cracks of her family's understanding, her community's support, and her government's programs. An adolescent compelled to marry or forced into early sexual activity finds her childhood snatched away, replaced by burdensome work and premature responsibilities. She often pays harsh personal costs in terms of her health, well-being, and earning capacity."

UNICEF

## WHY IS GIRLS' EDUCATION A STORY WORTH LOOKING INTO?

Every developing nation is increasing access to primary education and improving its overall quality, and this educational reform is news of great interest to media readers or audiences. Although many problems are not uniquely experienced by girls, their impact on girls' chances for enrollment and persistence is often more severe than for boys.

In the course of covering the news of educational reform, journalists report on the broad issues of educational access, infrastructure, and instructional quality. The reporters who know where to look will be able to find the important story of girls' education that lies within the broader report. Journalists will know what approaches will or will not be appropriate for the region, but they might consider the following questions to bolster their story lines when covering educational reform news:

<b>Educational Reform Issue</b>	<b>The Girls' Education Story</b>
Building more schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Are the new schools being built with separate latrines and water facilities for girls?</li><li>- Are schools being planned for areas in the vicinity of underserved populations of girls?</li><li>- Are girls protected adequately with walls around the school?</li></ul>
Hiring teachers and improving instructional quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Is there an active effort to hire and house female teachers?</li><li>- Are teachers aware of the common bias favoring boys' participation in classroom activities?</li><li>- Have the curricula and school texts been reviewed to eliminate negative gender stereotyping toward girls?</li></ul>
Reducing school costs for families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Is there flexibility in the requirement for school uniforms and supplies?</li><li>- How are the local business and religious communities contributing to the education of more girls?</li><li>- Are scholarship programs available for girls?</li></ul>
Reaching out-of-school girls	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Are learning arrangements available in villages for girls who are not in formal classrooms (including evening classes, home schools, girls' clubs, community schools, or mentoring programs)?</li><li>- How are NGOs, religious organizations, or private sector groups contributing to the creation of educational alternatives to the formal primary school program?</li><li>- Does either law or custom prevent girls' attendance or re-enrollment after pregnancy?</li></ul>

## WHERE ARE THE RESOURCES THAT JOURNALISTS CAN USE?

Like their audiences, reporters need reliable facts and sources of information on girls' education to tell the story. Since the primary responsibility lies with the government, journalists or reporters may be familiar with the national ministry of education as a source for breaking news or background statistics. They may be surprised to learn about other resources that will enhance their coverage. Advocates for girls' education can be found working in the public and private sectors, in communities, as well as government and international organizations. Reporters may be surprised at some of the fresh views for stories they can obtain from the following sources:

- *Local women's associations, local improvement organizations*
- *Local business owners who provide materials for schools*
- *Religious leaders who make facilities available for girls' programs*
- *Community networks/extension programs that promote girls' education*
- *National teacher's unions that review curriculum and textbooks*
- *Ministries of Public Works, Water, Agriculture, and Health whose policies and practices affect girls' education*
- *International donor organizations that support girls' education*
- *International and local NGOs that help local communities*

## HOW MUCH TIME WILL IT TAKE TO COVER GIRLS' EDUCATION?

Covering girls' education does not necessarily have to add time to a journalist's regular duties. Since girls' education has so many facets, its story can be incorporated into the media coverage of a wide variety of current events: the growth of the economy, improvements in education, and the health and welfare of the nation depend on the education of girls.

The time journalists invest in learning about and staying current with girls' education will be recouped over time. Familiarity with the girls' education advocates in the area can provide journalists with ongoing assistance in the form of story ideas, schedules for site visits, and arrangements of interviews. Although women journalists bring special insight to the importance of girls' education, keep in mind that men with daughters also show interest in this assignment.

## SUMMARY

The importance of educating girls is entering public consciousness globally. Playing a key role, the media are at the leading edge of the growing national and international understanding of girls' and women's contributions to the economy and national security. Members of the media know that the progress of a nation's educational system will remain a major story until all boys and girls receive a quality education. No country can afford to bypass the education of half of its population. Coverage of girls' education affords the media many opportunities today to contribute to their nation's growing commitment to schooling girls.



## WHERE TO GO FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information, contact the ministry or department of education for a list of schools and organizations working in education in your region. You may also wish to contact one of the following organizations:

United National Children's Fund  
(UNICEF)  
3 UN Plaza H-9F  
New York, NY 20017 USA  
<http://www.unicef.org>

World Bank  
1818 H Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20433 USA  
<http://www.worldbank.org>

The United Nations Education,  
Scientific, and Cultural Organization  
UNESCO Publishing, Promotion,  
and Sales Division  
1, rue Miollis F  
75732 Paris CEDEX 15 France  
<http://www.unesco.org/education>

United States Agency for International Development (USAID)  
Office of Women in Development  
Ronald Reagan Building  
Dr. Susie Clay  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Room 3.8.42U  
Washington, DC 20523-3801 USA  
Email: [sclay@usaid.gov](mailto:sclay@usaid.gov)

This paper is one of a series of project designs on activities to promote girls' education. The series includes:

1. *Enhancing Girls' Education through Community Schools*
2. *Improving the Physical Environment in Support of Girls' Education*
3. *Investments That Yield High Returns: Scholarships for Girls*
4. *Using Incentives to Promote Girls' Education*
5. *Using Mentoring to Promote Girls' Education*
6. *Using Special Programs as a Strategy to Educate Out-of-School Girls*
7. *Using Girls' Clubs to Promote Girls' Education*
8. *The Media and Girls' Education: Reporting on an Important Subject*
9. *Using Social Mobilization to Support Girls' Education*
10. *Using Child Care Strategies in Support of Girls' Education*

You can obtain copies of these reports from the Girls' and Women's Education Activity, American Institutes for Research, 1815 N. Ft. Myer Drive, Suite 600, Arlington, VA 22209, USA. Tel: (703) 527-5546; Fax: (703) 527-4661; e-mail: [girls\\_education@air-dc.org](mailto:girls_education@air-dc.org)

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